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Reagan foreign policy staff, directions still far from clear

Early tests may come in Middle East,
China; special mission for Kissinger?

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Washington
Foreign policy differences persist in the Reagan camp and will only be resolved once the President-elect chooses his secretary of state.

This is the word from several of Governor Reagan's foreign policy advisers who further say that Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr. (USA, ret.), the former NATO commander, is still a leading candidate for the job of secretary of state.

These advisers also say that former Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger is likely to get an assignment from Reagan, possibly as special envoy for Middle East negotiations. Despite controversy over his financial affairs, Reagan's chief foreign policy aide, Richard Allen, is seen as likely to become the White House assistant for national security in the new administration.

Differences among Reagan advisers are most notable in the key area of Middle East policy. But some differences also seem to persist with regard to policy toward China.

A member of the State Department transition team preparing for the changeover said there was a considerable degree of consensus among the President-elect's foreign policy advisers when it came to US-Soviet relations and the need to bolster American defenses. There also was a large measure of agreement, he said, on a need to strengthen the State Department, the Voice of America, and the Central Intelligence Agency.

At the same time, some Reagan advisers are said to be proposing that sharp cuts be made in the staff of the National Security Council. That staff, in the Reagan view, has under the Carter administration usurped certain policymaking functions that properly belong to the State Department.

When it comes to the Middle East, a variety of views has surfaced among Reagan foreign policy advisers. Some are said to believe that the Camp David peace process has outlived its usefulness and that new avenues should be explored to reach a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. One such approach, which is much talked about, is a so-called Jordanian option. This is often understood to mean Israeli territorial concessions on the occupied West Bank of the Jordan linked to an accommodation with King Hussein.

If General Haig is named secretary of state, friends of Israel are expected to be pleased. This is partly because the former NATO commander has stressed the "strategic importance" of Israel to the West. But some Democratic US senators have questioned whether General Haig could be confirmed by the Senate because of allegations that he abused power while in the White House during the Watergate affair. Members of the Reagan transition teams assert, however, that he would be overwhelmingly confirmed.

Richard Allen, considered the most likely choice for national security adviser, is another friend of the Israelis. He recently authorized Sol Linowitz, the current US envoy for Middle East negotiation, to tell the leaders of Egypt and Israel that President-elect Reagan would depart from the Camp David framework for peace only if it was with their agreement.

Mr. Allen's appointment to high position had earlier been cast in doubt by published reports that alleged he had used an official position in the Nixon administration to obtain Japanese business contracts. President-elect Reagan later said one of his advisers had examined Allen's record and found the allegations to be without substance.

One of Reagan's foreign policy advisers said Dr. Kissinger had continued to consult with Reagan after the Nov. 4 election and had played an active role in the President-elect's interim foreign policy advisory board. Indeed, it was said that Kissinger sometimes dominated the discussions of that board. The expectation was that he would be given a special mission by the President-elect.

Some observers seem to think that an appointment of Kissinger to such a position would be yet another signal that Reagan intends to continue to moderate some of his foreign policy views and avoid moving to the extreme right.

On China, the President-elect some time ago appeared to retreat from the position that the US must somehow reestablish official ties with Taiwan.

In the Middle East, the new President may face some early testing of new policies. Thus far, Reagan has placed little stress on the Palestinian issue. But an American familiar with the thinking of the leadership of Saudi Arabia said the Saudis intend to press hard on the point that resolution of the Palestinian question is a "centerpiece" of Saudi attitudes toward the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Saudis are expected to stress that their